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### The information content of magazine advertising in market and transition economies

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The Information Content of Magazine  
Advertising in Market and Transition  
Economies

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**ABSTRACT.** This study examines differences in the information content of magazine advertisements across market and transition economies in Europe. Content analyses are performed on 396 advertisements that appeared in women's magazines in the Russian Federation, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Results of statistical analyses reveal marked differences between economies with respect to the information content of advertisements. Compared to market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain significantly more product-related information, and focus less on consumers' life style. In addition, they contain more prize winning contests and their glossy magazines contain more availability information. The study also explores reasons for these differences and discusses their implications.

Over the past years, the countries of the former Eastern Europe have experienced major changes in their economic systems and in the way in which consumers behave (Ger, Belk, & Lascu, 1993; Lofman, 1993). Due to a relative lack of commercial advertising under communist rule, consumers in these countries have had to adjust to this new form of communication (Jeannet & Hennessey, 1995, p. 509). Early surveys suggested that consumers in former communist countries consider it more important that the ads they face are clear, credible, and simple to understand (Heyder, Musiol, & Peters, 1992). Consumers in West European countries, on the other hand, seem to be more concerned with image (Wiles, Wiles, & Tjernlund, 1996), yet pertinent research across a range of European countries and advertisements is not abundant.

In a recent article, Abernethy and Franke (1996) described the results of a meta-analysis regarding the information content of advertisements. Almost 60 studies were reported, from many different countries, but important regions of the world were left uncovered by all of them. For instance, no studies reported on the information content of advertisements in the transition economies associated with the former USSR. Our paper examines the information content of four



countries, two from transition economies, and two from market economies. Results can improve the knowledge of advertising strategies that are used in these countries, and give an indication of differences in consumer values and desires regarding advertising content (Tse, Belk, & Zhou, 1989; Zandpour, Chang, & Catalano, 1992). Identifying these differences may be useful in understanding the role that advertising plays in moving from one economic system to another.

The information content of advertising can be examined by isolating “quantifiable information that may potentially assist the typical consumer in making an intelligent choice” (Stern, Krugman, & Resnik, 1981). The objective information content of advertisements is measured rather than subjective information use (Abernethy & Franke, 1996). We examine the information content with which consumers in the four countries are confronted. The study does not value one type of information over the other or assess the need for different types of information. Rather, it examines the types of information elements that are actually applied in advertisements in countries that differ in the extent to which they have adopted a market economy.

The concept of advertising evolution will be elaborated upon in the next section. Then, hypotheses will be derived concerning information content and creative strategies of advertising, followed by a brief discussion of advertising regulation issues. Subsequently, the sample of countries and magazines will be examined, and the method and design of the study will be presented.

#### ADVERTISING EVOLUTION

Variations in advertising practices and differences in information levels across countries can be attributed to the level of economic development of the country (Abernethy & Franke, 1996). In fact, the meta-analysis of Abernethy and Franke regarding the information content of advertising revealed more information elements in developed countries, perhaps because of higher education and literacy levels. Countries that were examined included China, Taiwan, India, and part of Latin America. When considering the transition economies in Europe, education and literacy effects may be less of an issue there. Indeed, as argued below, transition economies may be expected to have more information-rich advertising.

Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) describe the concept of the evolution of advertising, which encompasses the division of advertising into four stages, as developed by Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990). These four stages are: (a) the product information stage, (b) the product image stage, (c) the personalization stage, and (d) the lifestyle stage. In the first stage (the product information stage) consumers are assumed to be primarily interested in product features and information about product use. Advertisements at this stage feature a high level of written text explaining the merits of the product (Leiss et al., 1990). This develops into advertisements that use text to explain the meaning of an illustration. In later stages, visual representations of meaning are often used in advertisements. Symbolic values are believed to play a more prominent role, and the audience is assumed to be capable of very complex visual decoding. This sequence of stages may be partly related to the adjustments of consumers to large-scale advertising. Rice and Lu (1988) found that the level of information content in China was relatively high, and hypothesize that this is partly due to "the limited experience of most Chinese citizens with consumer purchases – which leads to high-involvement decision making" (p. 46).

We expect that a similar process will evolve in transition economies in Europe. Here, advertising is likely to be undergoing the earlier phases of development (Jeannet & Hennessey, 1995, p. 509) as consumers have had less exposure to commercial advertising. Of course, deviations may occur, since advertising is also related to other factors, some of which are country-specific. Advertising in transition economies will probably be influenced by the culture of the country, as well as by other societies, in particular Western societies.

The transition from a centrally planned system toward a market-oriented one has brought about uncertainty for the inhabitants. Advertising managers may assume that this leads to a higher need for factual information in transition economies (Heyder et al., 1992; Jeannet & Hennessey, 1995, p. 509), implying that advertisements in transition economies will contain more information than advertisements in market economies. An important question is which types of information will be most often presented in the former group of advertisements. The information cues of this study are based on the often-used Resnik and Stern (1977) information classification system. Resnik and Stern were the first to operationally define what

is considered to be useful information, by proposing 14 information cues that can be present in advertisements. This objective scheme for evaluating the information content of advertisements has been widely used by researchers in advertising, marketing, journalism, and international business (Abernethy & Franke, 1996).

The information that is presented to consumers may relate to any part of the marketing mix: the product, price, distribution, and promotion. The 14 information cues of the Resnik and Stern information content coding scheme fit into these broad categories of information. Furthermore, it may be useful to include one additional category: assurance for the consumer. Assuring the consumer of the quality of the product and the trustworthiness of the company can be important, especially in the transition economies. Therefore, in this paper, the system of 14 cues will be extended and split into four main information categories: (a) product related information, (b) price/promotion related information, (c) information on availability, and (d) assurance for the consumer.

#### *Product Related Information*

Since market economies are characterized by more mature product markets than transition economies, the evolution of advertising theory described earlier would suggest less need for objective differentiation of products in these economies (Tse et al., 1989), whereas in Eastern European countries, information about product and product varieties are considered important (Heyder et al., 1992). Prior research regarding Chinese advertising indicates that especially performance and quality appeared relatively often in these advertisements, possibly due to inexperience and low income which focuses attention on information about product attributes (Rice & Lu, 1988). A similar situation, albeit not nearly to the extent as was present in the Chinese case, may lead to differences between Eastern and Western European advertising. This means that product related information is probably more prevalent in advertisements in transition economies than in market economies.

H1: Compared to advertisements in market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain more product related information cues.

*Price/Promotion Related Information*

Since consumers in transition economies generally have less purchasing power than those in market economies, it may be assumed that they are more interested in information about prices in order to assess the affordability of products. In this sense, consumers in transition economies may be more concerned with prices than consumers in market economies (Lofman, 1993). However, this may not automatically lead to more price information in advertisements in transition economies. Inflation is more prominent in transition economies than in market economies (World Bank, 1996), making the value of price information provided in ads depreciate quickly (Stigler, 1961). Hence, we cannot predict with any certainty whether price promotion will be more prevalent in transition economies.

Consumers in transition economies may, however, be more sensitive to non-price special offers, such as premiums, bonus packs, and sweepstakes. Whereas the direct mentioning of prices in an advertisement may not always be feasible due to inflation, advertisements in transition economies may contain more promotions as a response to higher consumer interest in product affordability. Contests with desirable consumer durables as grand prizes is one example of such promotions. They offer consumers in transition economies an opportunity to speed up the acquisition of a more luxurious lifestyle. Advertising managers may infer that special offers and prize winning contests appeal to the desire of consumers to acquire more luxury products, and are more effective in transition economies than in market economies.

H2: Compared to advertisements in market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain more information on promotions, such as prize winning contests and special offers.

*Information on Availability*

In a country where consumer goods are difficult to locate and obtain, emphasis on availability can be expected (Rice & Lu, 1988). Particularly the retail and wholesale markets may be inefficient in countries such as Russia (Reich, 1996). A large part of the distribution system in former Eastern Europe was out of date, even if marketing activity has concentrated on the creation of a better retail

infrastructure (Blackett, 1992; Lofman, 1993). Notwithstanding that many consumers in transition economies are by now used to new distribution structures (Lascu, Manrai, & Manrai, 1993), place of purchase may still be important since many of their stores do not carry a broad range of different brands. Thus, manufacturers can be inclined to mention place of purchase of their particular brand.

Addresses provide information on the physical availability of products, as well as an opportunity to request additional general information about the product. This latter argument will certainly hold for the provision of telephone numbers in advertisements.

H3: Compared to advertisements in market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain more information on availability. Especially point-of-purchase information such as addresses will be mentioned more often.

#### *Assurance for the Consumer*

The turbulent environment created by the transition process has often lead to the abuse of consumers' rights (Kozminski, 1992). In such a situation, offering assurance to the consumer may be very important. We do not expect large differences in the mention of explicit guaranties and warranties in the advertisements from transition and market economies, as they will be related primarily to certain product categories, such as consumer durables, and less to country-related characteristics. Implicit assurances, such as "country-of-origin" cues, may be more often encountered in advertising in transition economies. These country-of-origin cues can play an important role in the purchase decision of consumers as a product cue, which is simple to understand and which is used to evaluate product quality (Eroglu & Machleit, 1989), especially by novice consumers (Hong & Wyer, 1989; Maheswaran, 1994). If advertising managers assume that consumer expertise is less extensive in transition economies than in market economies, country-of-origin cues are likely to be considered more effective. Another reason why country-of-origin cues from a Western country may be more persuasive in transition economies is that they are seen as symbols of a better life (Ger et al., 1993). A country-of-origin cue, in particular when the country is associated with the "good life" (France, Italy, US), may be a key to success for many products. Indeed, one study found that country-of-origin information

has a significant influence on product evaluations made by Czech consumers (Klenosky, Benet, & Chadraha, 1996).

H4: Compared to advertisements in market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain more implicit assurances. Especially, country-of-origin cues will be more often used.

### *Creative Strategy*

Creative strategy is considered to be the policy or guiding principle determining the general nature and character of individual advertising messages (Zandpour et al., 1992). One approach to gauging creative strategy is to concentrate on the differences between so-called “think” and “feel” elements in advertisements (Rossiter, Percy, & Donovan, 1991). “Think advertisements” are advertisements in which a product solves or avoids a problem, and advertisements in which a buying decision is made based on logical arguments or objective criteria. One example is an advertisement for Oilatum, a bath lotion. The advertisement clearly articulates the problems of dry skin and eczema, and how the product can be used to solve these problems. “Feel advertisements” focus on the pleasure the product gives when used, or the lifestyle for which the product is suited. Clear examples can be found for products such as perfumes, where advertisements often contain only a picture of an attractive person in a life-style setting and the brand name. In general, most advertisements contain both think and feel elements (Rossiter et al., 1991), but one type of element can be more dominant. The central hypothesis of this study is that more information cues are present in transition economies, and less image-related information. This suggests that more think elements and less feel elements are present in the advertisements in transition economies as compared to market economies.

H5: Compared to advertisements in market economies, advertisements in transition economies contain more think elements and less feel elements.

### ADVERTISING REGULATION

The information content of advertisements may differ as a response to consumer needs, but also as a response to the rules and regula-



tions in different countries. Certain types of information or statements may not be allowed, while other types of information may be obligatory. Reich (1996) provides a detailed review of current advertising regulations in Russia. In this country, there is a general obligation to provide necessary and accurate information concerning products and services. However, this information need not be present in the advertisements, but can be provided by different means. The positive Russian approach to information is contrary to that of many other countries that rule against the provision of misleading information (Reich, 1996). The advertising codes and regulations in many market economies, and also in transition economies such as the Czech Republic, formulate this requirement in similar ways. Advertisements "should be legal, decent, honest, and truthful," and "no advertisement should mislead" (British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion). Although the positive Russian approach may be different from the approach taken by other countries, the effect on the specific creative tactics used in advertisements is considered to be minimal.

In general, Russian legislation is developing dynamically, and is "part of the change and instrument of change of the Russian society and economy in the interest of the consumer" (Reich, 1996). In many transition economies, the rather sudden need for advertisement regulation has led to rules and regulations based on those existing in market economies, e.g., EC regulation, with some changes tailored to their specific situation. Overall, the codes and rules for magazine advertisements do not seem to differ greatly among the countries in this study, although the wording of the regulations may vary. Regulations with respect to sales promotions, such as sweepstakes and other prize winning contests (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 1999, pp. 823–826) are an exception. In the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, sales promotion activities are relatively free from legal constraints, whereas in the Netherlands legal controls are stricter. For instance, free draws are not permitted in the Benelux countries, while they are permitted in both the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. In addition, competitions are permitted only under certain conditions in the Netherlands, while these restrictions do not apply to other countries, such as the afore-mentioned United Kingdom and Czech Republic (Kotler et al., 1999). We will return to this when we discuss our results.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

*Sample Design*

Three samples are to be constructed: samples of (a) countries, (b) magazines, and (c) advertisements in these magazines.

*Countries.* The focus of this study is on the differences between advertising in transition and market economies. Four countries were selected: the Russian Federation, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Two of these countries are in a transition stage (former communist countries) and two are market oriented. In terms of population numbers, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands are comparable in size, while the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation are substantially larger (World Bank, 1996, p. 189).

We acknowledge that many differences exist between the countries of Eastern Europe, and that the situation in the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation differs in many respects. During the socialist era, information restrictions in Czechoslovakia were less strong than in Russia. Due to their closeness to Germany and Austria, people in some regions could watch foreign TV channels and were consequently aware of Western European life style and were exposed to commercial advertisements. The Czech Republic identified itself more with Western Europe than other countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Heyder et al., 1992). The Russian Federation has probably had to adjust to the most pronounced changes (Jeannet & Hennessey, 1995, p. 509). The Russian Federation has a longer history of communism and has been more restrictive in terms of information penetration, imports of goods from the West, and ability of its citizens to travel abroad (Kozminski, 1992; Leonidou, 1992). The Czech Republic and the Russian Federation were, in effect, chosen because they are quite different. Results that can be generalized across these two countries may also hold for other Eastern European countries. Some characteristics of the four countries included in this study are presented by Table I.

*Magazines and advertisements.* Magazines were chosen as the media to study, for the following reasons. They provide high quality advertisements (Wiles et al., 1996), are easily accessible, and are available in the four countries under study. In addition, the percentage of media

TABLE I  
Characteristics of the Four Countries

Country	Population (millions) <sup>1</sup>	Inflation, GDP deflator (annual %) <sup>2</sup>			
		1994	1995	1996	1997
Russian Federation	148	307.3	170.7	43.8	16.6
Czech Republic	10	22.9	10.4	9.4	6.5
Netherlands	15	2.3	1.6	1.3	1.9
United Kingdom	58	1.6	2.4	3.0	2.7

<sup>1</sup> Source: World Bank (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Source: World Bank National Accounts Data, and OECD National Accounts Data Files.

advertising expenditures going to print advertising is relatively high (Wiles et al., 1996). Women's magazines were selected, since these are widely available in the four countries. In addition, the type of products advertised will vary to a larger extent than in special interest magazines. Both international glossy magazines and women's weeklies were chosen. The international glossy magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* were chosen, since these are to be found in each of the four countries. While the general set-up and type of articles are the same for the four countries, the specific content differs. The women's weeklies were matched according to their target group. Table II gives an overview of the magazines that were used in the analysis. Issues came from the period between October 1996 and June 1997. Of a total of 43 magazine issues, 14 are December issues. As the advertising in December is likely to differ from the rest of the year, separate control analyses were performed to check for this, but there appears to be no effect of December advertising in the data set.

From each of the issues, a random sample of 10 advertisements was used for the analysis. When the issue had 10 or less advertisements, all of them were used. Only ads of one-half page or more were included in the analysis, while promotion for the magazine itself and advertorials were excluded.

### *Content Analysis*

Six judges were involved in coding the advertisements: three of the authors and three external judges. Judges from both types of economies were chosen to minimize the problem of cultural background. Over

TABLE II  
Magazines and Advertisements Used in the Content Analysis

Country	Magazines used (number of issues)	# Ads in magazines	# Coded
Russian Federation	Cosmopolitan (1), Elle (2)	281	30
	Good Housekeeping (1), Liza (1), Krestyanka (2)	74	33
Czech Republic	Cosmopolitan (2), Elle (2)	199	40
	Tina (2), Vlasta (2), Katka (2), Zena a zivot (2)	103	67
Netherlands	Cosmopolitan (2), Elle (2)	189	40
	Libelle (2), Margriet (2), Flair (2), Viva (2)	172	80
United Kingdom	Cosmopolitan (2), Elle (2)	372	40
	Woman (2), Bella (2), Best (2), Now (2)	80	66

three-quarters of the advertisements were coded by two different judges. Less than one quarter was coded by a single judge. Following the coding, differences between the two judges that coded the same advertisement were discussed, and if necessary a third judge resolved problems.

To measure information content, Resnik and Stern's (1977) information content coding scheme was employed, together with additional information cues (see Appendix). To maintain comparability with previous research, all traditional cues were included. Next to these 14 traditional cues, we added contest, address/telephone number, and country-of-origin cues. In accordance with the theory section, the information cues can be condensed into four broader categories of cues as provided in Table III. The cues refer to specific information elements that are typically provided in written statements (e.g., price of the product, product ingredients). Although pictorial elements may provide some type of information for consumers, the content analysis of the information cues focuses solely on the textual information in the advertisements, with a single exception for symbols of country-of-origin.

In addition to the information cues, the presence of think and feel elements was also assessed. Four items were used to this end: (a) if the product in the ad solved or avoided a problem, (b) if the purchase decision in the ad was based on logical arguments, (c) if the product

TABLE III  
Coding Categories for Information Content

Information category	Information cues
Product related information	Components & contents, nutrition, packaging & shape, quality, performance, taste, new ideas
Price/promotion related information	Price-value, special offers, contests
Availability information	Availability, address, phone number
Assurance for the consumer	Guaranties & warranties, safety, independent research, company research, country symbols, made-in statements

in the ad yields pleasure when using it, and finally (d) if the ad showed the lifestyle that matches the product. These items included the pictorial as well as the textual information in an advertisement. All items were coded on five-point “not at all” – “completely” scales. Where two judges coded the same advertisement, the average was taken of the appraisals.

## RESULTS

### *Sample and Reliability*

The calculation of the reliability of the coding is based on 323 advertisements that were coded by two judges (82% of the total sample); it averages 91% of agreement. The interjudge reliability measure proposed by Perreault and Leigh (1989) that adjusts for the number of coding categories also equals 0.91, indicating very high reliability.

### *Controlling for Product Categories*

Advertisements for different product categories can differ with respect to the amount and type of information elements that are present (Stern, Krugman, & Resnik, 1981). Therefore, if there are differences between the product categories advertised in transition and those advertised in market economies, this could obscure the results. To control for this effect, the product category of each of the advertisements was coded. The coding categories are based on previous product category group-

ings that were integrated by Abernethy and Franke (1996). Product categories with too low an occurrence are not reported. Table IV shows the product categories for each of the countries, and for the two magazine types. The product categories significantly differ between the four countries ( $\chi^2_{30} = 50.2$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.012$ ), and between the two country groups ( $\chi^2_{10} = 21.0$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.021$ ). As Abernethy and Franke argue that the distinction between durable and non-durable products can be particularly important, this classification is also provided in the table. With respect to this distinction (durable, non-durable, other) significant differences between countries also exist ( $\chi^2_6 = 14.7$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.023$ ).

Accepting the argument of Abernethy and Franke that the distinction between durables and non-durables is especially crucial, the analyses and results that will be reported control for the differences in this respect. Controlling more broadly for product category effects, using the 11 individual product categories, did not alter the main conclusions.

### *Information Content*

Our analyses reveal an average of 2.44 information cues in advertisements from the transition economies and 2.02 cues in advertisements from the market economies, a significant difference ( $F_{1,393} = 6.66$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.01$ ) using the original 14 cues of the Resnik and Stern classification system. As expected, more product information cues are present in advertising in the transition economies. Table V shows the presence of information cues in each of the four countries.

To test the effect of market versus transition economies on the information cues that are included, logistic regression was applied. The log of the odds (logit) of the presence of an information element is examined. In order to adjust for the effect of product category, a categorical covariate measuring the type of product (durable, non-durable, other) was entered into the regressions. Since the presence of information elements may be different for glossy magazines and women's weeklies, a dummy for magazine type was included as well. In addition, the possibility of an interaction effect between country and magazine was examined. The presence of such an interaction effect would indicate that certain information cues may be included more often in advertisements of a specific type of magazine in one

TABLE IV  
Product Categories Advertised

Product category	Total % ( <i>n</i> = 395)	Glossy % ( <i>n</i> = 149)	WW % ( <i>n</i> = 246)	Russia % ( <i>n</i> = 62)	CR % ( <i>n</i> = 107)	NL % ( <i>n</i> = 120)	UK % ( <i>n</i> = 106)
Food/alcohol/tobacco	17.0	7.4	22.8	11.3	15.0	20.8	17.9
Personal care	30.1	46.3	20.3	38.7	35.5	31.7	17.9
Furniture/home furnishings/appliances	4.8	2.0	6.5	12.9	3.7	1.7	4.7
Clothing	7.8	14.8	3.7	9.7	3.7	10.0	8.5
Cars/car parts	2.8	3.4	2.4	0.0	5.6	3.3	0.9
Household	5.6	4.0	6.5	6.5	3.7	5.8	6.6
Financial/transportation/travel	3.5	1.3	4.9	1.6	4.7	2.5	4.7
Toys/recreational/entertainment	6.3	4.0	7.7	3.2	1.9	7.5	11.3
Services/retailers	12.2	10.1	13.4	6.5	13.1	10.0	17.0
Medicine/medical products	7.6	2.7	10.6	8.1	10.3	4.2	8.5
Other	2.3	4.0	1.2	1.6	2.8	2.5	1.9
Durable products	26.3	30.2	24.0	33.9	16.8	27.5	30.2
Non-durable products	56.5	55.7	56.9	56.5	63.6	59.2	46.2

TABLE V  
Presence of the Information Elements in the Advertisements<sup>1</sup>

Variable	Russia (%)	Czech Republic (%)	Netherlands (%)	United Kingdom (%)
Product related information	61.3	88.8	60.0	68.9
Quality	30.6	30.8	5.0	4.7
Performance	48.4	82.2	45.0	43.4
Packaging	8.1	19.6	3.3	6.6
Components	21.0	42.1	37.5	45.3
New ideas	3.2	12.1	6.7	4.7
Nutrition	3.2	0.0	5.8	4.7
Taste	1.6	0.9	0.0	0.9
Price/promotion information	8.1	29.9	27.5	33.0
Price	1.6	18.7	20.0	25.5
Contests	4.8	8.4	0.8	4.7
Offers	3.2	15.9	12.5	14.2
Availability information	56.5	50.5	44.2	54.7
Address	46.8	33.6	20.8	19.8
Availability	51.6	38.3	33.3	42.5
Phone number	43.5	27.1	32.5	32.1
Assurance/country of origin	35.5	34.6	38.3	34.9
Made-in statement	25.8	4.7	11.7	10.4
Independent research	0.0	1.9	0.0	6.6
Safety	3.2	10.3	13.3	4.7
Symbols	10.0	17.8	16.7	12.3
Guaranties	3.2	2.8	5.0	6.6
Company research	1.6	4.7	3.3	4.7

<sup>1</sup> Percentages of advertisements with at least one of the cues belonging to a particular category are presented. Since advertisements can have multiple cues from each category, the percentages for the cues do not necessarily add up to the total of the category.

of the country groups. Results of the logistic regressions are presented in Table VI.

*Product related information.* The results indicate that magazine advertising in transition economies does indeed rely more on information about quality and product performance. In addition, packaging and shape are emphasized more often. Figure 1 provides a pictorial representation of these results. It shows that more product-related information is present in women's weeklies than in glossy magazines, as would be expected, and that the percentage of advertisements containing product information is higher for transition economies. *Hypothesis 1* is thus supported.



TABLE VI  
Results of Logistic Regression for the Information Elements<sup>1</sup>

Variable	Model fit		Country type <sup>2</sup>		Magazine type <sup>3</sup>		Country type × magazine type	
	Chi-square	<i>p</i> -value	Coeff.	<i>p</i> -value	Coeff.	<i>p</i> -value	Coeff.	<i>p</i> -value
Product related	46.3	.00	0.86	.00	1.35	.00		
Quality	58.2	.00	2.26	.00	0.90	.01		
Performance	51.4	.00	1.15	.00	0.89	.00		
Packaging	24.1	.00	1.40	.00	0.02	.95		
Components	22.2	.00	−0.27	.21	0.93	.00		
New ideas	10.8	.03	0.45	.26	1.13	.03		
Nutrition	25.3	.00	−1.74	.03	2.14	.04		
Taste	6.7	.15						
Price/promotion	64.0	.00	−0.28	.27	1.14	.00		
Price	69.6	.00	−0.55	.07	1.37	.00		
Contests	12.2	.02	1.15	.03	1.72	.02		
Offers	19.2	.00	−0.06	.86	0.67	.06		

Availability info	75.8	.00	0.40	.08	−0.00	.99	−0.83	.07
Address	50.9	.00	1.41	.00	0.32	.26	−2.24	.00
Availability	102.2	.00	0.70	.01	0.37	.15	−1.69	.00
Phone number	45.4	.00	0.21	.38	−0.35	.14	−0.90	.06
Assurance/c-o-o	14.0	.01	−0.08	.70	0.37	.10		
Made-in statement	10.2	.04	0.12	.70	−0.41	.19		
Independent research	14.9	.01	−1.09	.18	8.92	.80		
Safety	10.6	.03	−0.28	.46	0.29	.45		
Symbols	6.8	.15						
Guaranties	17.8	.00	−0.46	.41	1.12	.09		
Company research	4.3	.36						

<sup>1</sup> Product category (durable, non-durable, other) is included as a categorical covariate. These results are not reported, as this is not the focus of the study. Product category was significant for performance, packaging, price/promotion category, price, offers, availability category, address, availability, phone number, assurance category, made in statement, safety, and guarantees.

<sup>2</sup> Positive coefficients indicate a higher presence of the information cue in advertisements from transition economies (dummy = 0.5 for transition economy, −0.5 for market economy).

<sup>3</sup> Positive coefficients indicate a higher presence of the information cue in advertisements from women's weeklies (dummy = 0.5 for women's weeklies, −0.5 for glossy magazines).

<sup>4</sup> Results are only provided when the interaction is significant at the 10% level.

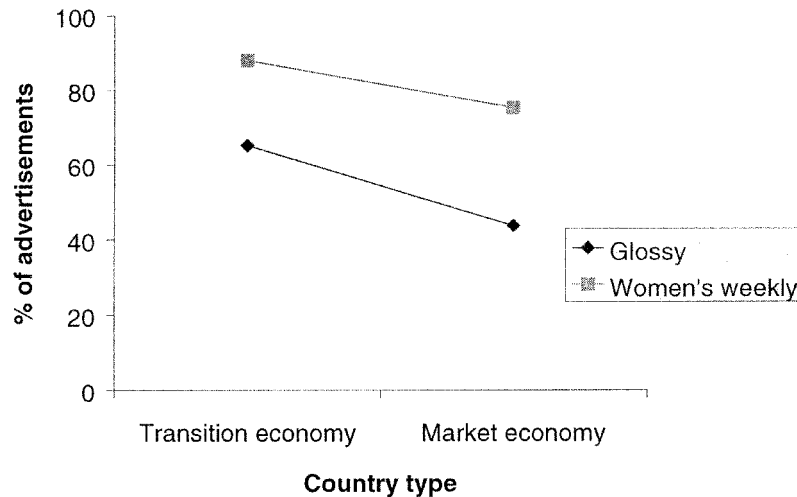


Figure 1. Product information in magazine advertisements.

*Price/promotion related information.* The results in Table VI indicate that the overall presence of price/promotion cues is not correlated with country type. Magazine type is significant, with more mentions of price/promotion in women's weeklies than in glossy magazines.

Turning to the results for the individual cues, more prize winning contests are indeed present in the advertisements from transition economies, supporting *Hypothesis 2*. The price cue is marginally significant, with less prices present in transition economies. This finding may be explained by the low presence of prices in the Russian advertisements (Table V). Mentioning price is less common in the Russian Federation. Possible reasons for this could be that different currencies are used in the various parts of the former Soviet Union, and the high level of inflation. Table I shows that the level of inflation in 1996 was 44% for the Russian Federation, while for the Czech Republic and the two market economies it was less than 10% and 3%, respectively.

*Information on availability.* For information on availability, there are direct effects of country type for addresses and the availability cue. The interaction effects of country type and magazine type are significant as well. The negative sign for the interaction effects in Table VI indicates that more availability information is present in the women's weeklies in market economies and in the glossy maga-

zines in transition economies. Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of the results. The effect may be due to the type of brands that are advertised in the international glossy magazines. In general, these are international and luxurious products and brands. In market economies they may rely on lifestyle advertising; in such economies specific information is needed less, and distribution structures are well established and known by the consumers, so that availability information is not a priority. In transition economies the situation is different. Especially luxurious products, and the distribution structure through which they can be obtained, are less well-known here. Consumers were aware of the distribution structure and outlets for necessities, but not for luxurious products. Hence, the need to inform about availability is higher for the luxurious brands in a product category. Thus one has to conclude that *Hypothesis 3* has some support but not for all kinds of magazines.

*Assurance for the consumer.* There are no significant country effects, and *Hypothesis 4* is not supported. Implications are discussed later.

#### *Creative Strategies*

The expected differences in information cues are reflections of expected differences in creative strategies. To test this, think and

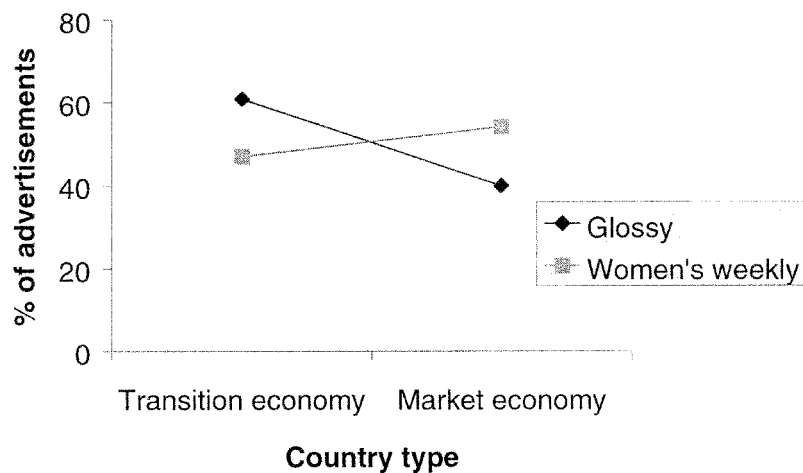


Figure 2. Availability information in magazine advertisements.

feel elements of the advertisements were appraised. Cronbach's alpha is 0.85 for the think elements and 0.63 for the feel elements, while the Pearson correlation is 0.74 and 0.46, respectively. Table VII provides the mean values for creative strategies.

ANOVA's were performed to determine differences between transition and market economies. Product category (dummies for durables and non-durables) was used as a covariate in these analyses. The effects of magazine type, country type, and possible interactions were examined, and results are presented in Table VIII. The results for magazine types are as expected: Advertisements in glossy magazines contain less think elements, and more lifestyle, than advertisements in women's weeklies. None of the interactions between country types and magazine types are significant. Of interest for the discussion are the effects of country type. Table VIII shows that more feel elements are present in advertisements from market economies, while the think elements are of the same magnitude across countries. Especially, more lifestyle is present in market economies than in transition economies, and this holds for both the glossy magazines and for the women's weeklies. These results provide partial support for *Hypothesis 5*.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study compared the information content of advertisements in transition and market economies in Europe. It examined glossy magazines and women's weeklies in the Russian Federation, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. We found that advertise-

TABLE VII  
Creative Strategy<sup>1</sup>

Variable	Russia (n = 107)	CR (n = 62)	NL (n = 120)	UK (n = 106)	Women's weekly	Glossy
Think elements	2.36	3.05	2.75	2.97	3.12	2.36
– Arguments	2.55	3.32	2.82	3.08	3.30	2.47
– Problem solving	2.18	2.77	2.69	2.86	2.94	2.25
Feel elements	2.44	3.09	3.18	2.96	2.90	3.11
– Lifestyle	2.37	2.79	3.92	3.05	2.74	3.21
– Pleasure	2.52	3.38	3.16	2.86	3.06	3.01

<sup>1</sup> Scores are based on 5-point scales; higher scores indicate that the aspect is more present in an advertisement.

TABLE VIII  
Effects of Country and Magazine Type on Creative Strategy

Variable	Durable		Non-durable		Country type <sup>1</sup>		Magazine type <sup>2</sup>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Think elements	3.2	.07	0.0	.85	0.1	.77	38.0	.00
– Arguments	2.9	.09	1.3	.25	1.8	.18	42.9	.00
– Problem solving	2.7	.10	2.0	.16	3.1	.08	25.0	.00
Feel elements	0.2	.66	1.4	.24	6.1	.01	5.7	.02
– Lifestyle	0.0	.97	5.6	.02	20.4	.00	23.0	.00
– Pleasure	0.7	.42	0.1	.76	0.1	.80	0.5	.50

<sup>1</sup> Positive coefficients indicate a higher presence of the information cue in advertisements from market economies.

<sup>2</sup> Positive coefficients indicate a higher presence of the information cue in advertisements from glossy magazines.

ments in transition economies contain more information cues, in support of the hypotheses outlined in the first part of the paper. In particular, more product-related information is present in advertisements from transition economies, and more availability information is present in the glossy magazines from these economies. In transition economies, advertisements try to provide consumers with an understanding of the product advantages, for instance in terms of quality, performance, and packaging. Another specific advertising tactic, the prize winning contest, is also more prevalent in transition economies.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The study has several limitations.

Firstly, the content analysis was carried out at one point in time only, which inhibits the analysis of changes over time. This makes it more difficult to draw strong conclusions regarding the influence of economic development and suggested advertising evolution stages.

Secondly, the study is limited with respect to the number of countries that were studied and the type of media that were used. Two countries were chosen from both market and transition economies in order to make the results more generalizable across these two country groups. However, differences between individual countries within the groups were also found, especially between the Czech Republic

and the Russian Federation. Therefore, some prudence is required when drawing firm conclusions based on country groups. It is not necessarily the case that the differences are representative for all transition economies. However, this is the first study in which multiple countries and print media in transition and market economies were compared using a detailed content analysis procedure.

Thirdly, consumer attitudes and behaviour and the reasons for differences in advertisement content between countries are not captured by the content analysis approach. Content analysis reflects what consumers are exposed to. It reveals what the advertisers believe to be valuable for the audience. The differences in information content observed, also when controlling for product categories, suggest that advertisers adjust their advertising to what they believe is the local demand for information. It does not necessarily mean that the advertisers are correct in their views, nor does our approach examine the impact of the difference in information content on behaviour and perceptions.

#### *Implications for Consumers*

Previous research on the perception of advertising by consumers has consistently pointed to structural differences between transition and market economies. In particular, it is argued that consumers in transition economies approach the concept of information differently (Heyder et al., 1992; Wells, 1994). They care about information on products and product variety, and take advertising seriously. Consumers in transition economies want the advertisements to be product-related, and to help them in purchase decisions.

The results of this paper have several implications for consumers and public policy. In general, our study found that the greater need for information in transition economies is reflected by the advertisements. However, when it comes to assurance of the consumer, advertisements in transition economies do not differ from those in market economies. In transition economies, where uncertainty is high, changes are rapid, and many new companies and brands appear on the market, such assurance for the consumer can be very important. Consumers would prefer trustworthy information regarding the products that are on the market, but the advertisements do not appear to provide this in any greater detail than elsewhere. It is an

interesting research question why the content of advertising does not address this alleged demand for quality assurance. Perhaps the regulation of advertising is not sufficiently advanced to ensure the credibility of quality assurance claims. In any case, this is an area in which consumer organizations can provide useful information regarding products and companies to inform and educate the consumer.

Of specific interest are differences in price/promotion related information. In countries with high levels of inflation, the value of price information is lowered, as it will soon be outdated. However, price information might also be very important for consumers in these countries, in order to be able to judge the affordability of products. In addition, our results indicate that advertisers may appeal to price-conscious consumers through special offers and prize winning contests. These types of promotions can be deceptive due to the more complex price structure associated with the product. The use of contests is an example where luxury products are presented as prizes to all consumers, but are won by few. Government intervention to obtain lower inflation levels may have the added benefit of indirectly leading to increases in the number of price cues in advertisements. Lower levels of inflation would lead to an environment in which consumers are better able to examine products for their affordability and directly compare prices. The results for the Czech Republic suggest that lower inflation may be associated with more price cues, but not with fewer prize winning contests (see Table V). Government and consumer rights groups may be advised to examine the use of prize winning contests and their effect on consumers. In the Netherlands, where regulation of contests is relatively strict, the number of such contests is considerably lower than in the other countries (Table V).

Two theories about advertising exist: advertising as information and advertising as power (Verbeke, 1992). In the first view, advertising informs consumers about product attributes, while in the second view, advertising affects consumer preferences and tastes. This paper has addressed the first theory, by providing evidence regarding the degree of information that is contained in an advertisement. It does not consider the veracity of the information, nor the degree to which it affects consumer preferences. Although the truthfulness of the claims has not been assessed, it is very important. In transition economies, many abuses of consumers' rights have been observed, and these are



enhanced by the turbulent environment. Consumer protection measures leading to increased trust may very well further the use of information cues in advertising in the transition economies.

### *Implications for Advertisers*

The results have implications for companies that advertise the same or similar products in different countries. Especially companies that are new to the markets can learn by observing the good practices of other advertisers. Availability and product information cues appear more often in transition economies, while lifestyle and specific needs such as nutritional information appear important in market economies. As consumers in the respective countries will be used to these different tactics, companies and advertisers will need to pay heed to such expectations. Advertisers who operate in multinational markets should be aware of differences in the economic development (at large) and the resulting differences in distribution structures, media environment, and information providing strategies used in various countries. Clearly, "Act local" also means adapting advertisements to the specific information needs that exist in market and transition economies. Yet consumers in Central and Eastern Europe do not like to be persuaded (Heyder et al., 1992). They prefer easily accessible information for the frequent buying decisions that they are learning to make. In such consumer socialization processes, clear, comprehensible, and trustworthy product advantages play a vital role. When advertisers from market economies simply duplicate their usual form of advertising in transition economies, they often fail, as they insufficiently consider the viewpoints and cognitive schemas of consumers in these economies. Consumers in transition economies often view the media as sources of intellectual, cultural, and educational information, while the use of the media for aggressive promotion of products is seen as an invasion of homes and personal lives (Wells, 1994).

## APPENDIX

## Extended Resnik and Stern Information Content Coding Scheme

Information cue	Description
Availability*	Where can the product be purchased? When will the product be available for purchase?
Company research*	Are data gathered by a company presented?
Components & contents*	What is the product composed of? What ingredients does it contain? What ancillary items are included with the product?
Guaranties & warranties*	What post-purchase assurances accompany the product?
Independent research*	Are results of research gathered by an "independent" research firm presented?
New ideas*	Is a totally new concept introduced in the advertisement? Are its advantages presented?
Nutrition*	Are specific data given concerning the nutritional content of a particular product, or is a direct specific comparison made with other products?
Packaging & shape*	What package is the product available in which makes it more desirable than alternatives? What special shapes is the product available in?
Performance*	What does the product do, and how well does it do what it is designed to do in comparison to alternative purchases?
Price-value*	What does the product cost? What is its value-retention capability? What is the need-satisfaction capability/dollars?
Quality*	What are the product's characteristics based on an objective evaluation of workmanship, engineering, durability, excellence of materials, structural superiority, superiority of personnel, attention to detail or special services?
Safety*	What safety features are available on a particular product?
Special offers*	What limited time non-price deals are available with a particular purchase?
Taste*	Is evidence presented that the taste of a particular product is perceived as superior in taste by a sample of potential customers?
Address	Is an address mentioned?
Country symbols	Are symbols of a country presented, e.g., flags, known places, buildings, stereotypes, and mention of the capital city?
Foreign text	Is text in a language other than that of the country in which the advertisement is published presented?
Foreign brand	Is a foreign brand name for the country in which the advertisement is published presented?
Made-in statements	Is an explicit statement regarding the country in which the product is made presented?
Phone number	Is a telephone number mentioned?
Contests	Is a prize-winning contest related to the product?

\* These items were included in the original Resnik and Stern coding scheme.

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